

XX.—*What is Turdus minutus Forster, from Cook's
"Botany Island."* By L. BRASIL, F.M.B.O.U.

UNDER the name *Turdus minutus*, J. R. Forster described two very different birds*. The first one, obtained in New Zealand, is, as everybody knows, the "Great-headed Titmouse" of Latham †, upon which was founded Gmelin's *Parus macrocephalus* ‡, *Myiomoira macrocephala macrocephala* of the present nomenclature. In Forster's 'Unpublished Iconography' this bird is represented on plate No. 149, where, according to Sharpe §, the figure is accompanied by the mention of "Queen Charlotte Sound, New Zealand," as the locality. The second bird, the one observed on Cook's "Botany Island" ||, in the close vicinity of New Caledonia, has not been identified hitherto with any of the species now known. It would seem that nobody has seen it again since it was discovered, and as the specimen brought over by Cook's Expedition has disappeared a long time ago, even if it was ever introduced into Europe at all at the time, it is only by going back, directly or otherwise, to the original description that a few authors have been able to speak of the bird. Before regarding it as a distinct and unnamed species, which he calls *Petroica forsteri* ¶, Gray had first spoken of it rather vaguely as *Petroica* (?)**. It is under one of those expressions that it was later on introduced into the works of

* J. R. Forster, *Descr. Anim.* 1844, p. 83.

† Latham, *Gen. Syn.* ii. 1783, p. 557, pl. lv..

‡ Gmelin, *Syst. Nat.* i. 1788, p. 1013.

§ R. B. Sharpe, *Hist. Coll. Nat. Hist. Brit. Mus.* ii. 1906, p. 195.

|| The sandy islet to which the name of Botany Island was given by Cook is called to-day on the French maps "l'Île Amère" ("l'Île Améré" on Commandant Laporte's map, published in 1900). It lies on the western edge of the group of reefs which separates the "Canal de la Havannah" from the "Passe de la Sarcelle." Its distance from the southern coast of New Caledonia is about 18 km.; on the other hand, it lies about 25 km. from the northern side of Kunié (Isle of Pines).

¶ G. R. Gray, *Cat. Birds Trop. Isl. Pacific Oc.* 1859, p. 15.

** G. R. Gray, *Proc. Zool. Soc. London*, 1859, p. 161.

Verreaux and Des Murs*, Marie †, and the Layards ‡. We must notice that the latter two naturalists, who have so carefully studied the ornithological fauna of New Caledonia and collected so many specimens themselves, mention expressly that they never obtained the species we are speaking of. Sharpe, then, thought it was right to suppress it from the world of birds, and to strike it out of nomenclature. This he does in the following terms § :—

“This bird (*Petræca forsteri* Gray) is mentioned here merely for the purpose of showing that it is a myth. Mr. Gray refers as a synonym the name of *Turdus minutus* Forster (*Descr. Anim.* p. 84), but this, from the figure and description, is *Petroeca macrocephala* of New Zealand. At page 257 of the same work, Forster casually mentions having observed *Turdus minutus* on Spruce-Tree Island, New Caledonia; and this is apparently Mr. Gray’s authority for naming the species *Petroica forsteri*, on the chance of its turning up in the locality. Should a *Petræca* occur in New Caledonia, it would very likely be *P. similis* of the New Hebrides.”

These lines show in a very striking way what mistakes an author is liable to make when the references made have not been carefully looked up. Had Sharpe opened Forster’s work, p. 84, quoted by Gray, he would have realised that there was no need of Forster’s assertion, p. 257, to determine Gray to create his *Petroica forsteri*; the description, p. 84, of a specimen found *not* in New Zealand, but precisely in one of the islands of the New Caledonian archipelago, easily proves that the form mentioned is very different from the bird which had been caught by Forster in New Zealand, drawn by his son, and a most correct and detailed description of which is to be found in his book, p. 83. Comparing the two descriptions, we see directly that the birds have nothing

* J. Verreaux et O. Des Murs, *Rev. et Mag. Zool.* (2) xii. 1860, p. 391.

† E. Marie, *Actes Soc. Linn. Bordeaux*, xxvii. 1870, p. 327.

‡ E. L. & E. L. C. Layard, *Ibis*, (4) ii. 1878, p. 254.

§ R. B. Sharpe, *Cat. Birds Brit. Mus.* iv. 1879, p. 179 note.

in common—neither the size nor the colour of the plumage*. On the other hand, we have no right to suspect so true and scrupulous an author as Forster of having described a bird which never existed, or of having altered any diagnosis to please his fauzy. Instead of looking upon *Petroica forsteri* as “a myth,” we are inclined to believe that, supposing the species has not become extinct like so many others since the time of Cook’s Voyages in the Southern Seas, it simply has been mixed with another and hidden under its name. By taking up that line and seeking,—not very far—, I am sure Sharpe would have found the solution of the problem.

Let us go back to the original description. After having largely given the characters of his *Turdus minutus* from New Zealand, Forster fully describes the bird of Botany Island, thus † :—

“Aliud hujus aviculae specimine in iusula *Botany* ad Eurum Novae Caledoniae sita, accepi et sic descripsi: (Femina erat).

“*Rostrum* atrum, basi trigonum, rectum, apice incurvum; *Mandibula superior* longior, ante apicem emarginata. *Faux* vibrissis patentibus cincta. *Lingua* cartilaginea, ensiformis, subtruncata, bifida, ciliata. *Nares* oblongae, squamula tectae. *Oculi* iride fusco-nigricante. *Pedes* graciles, longiusculi, fusco-nigri. *Tibiae* nulla incisura. *Ungues nigri*, *posticus* longior. *Caput* et *genae* cinerea. *Dorsum* et *uropygium* fusco virentia. *Superciliada* (albi non alba). *Gula*, *pectus* et *crissum* alba. *Abdomen*, *hypochondria* et *femora* flavescencia. *Alae* complicatae medium circiter caudae

* The opinion that the two birds belong to a single species does not seem to have been that of the companions of Forster. Going over all the natural productions of Botany Island, does not Cook himself say (I am only able to make use of a French translation):—“Un des officiers tira un faucon pareil à ceux qu’on trouve sur les côtes d’Angleterre (*Falco Haliætos*, voyez la zoologie britannique de M. Pennant), & nous primes une nouvelle espèce d’attrappe-mouche” (Cook, *Voy. dans l’Hémisph. austr.* Trad. franç. v. pp. 60–61, 1778). This new kind of “attrappe-mouche” evidently stands for the second specimen of *Turdus minutus* in Forster.

† J. R. Forster, *loc. cit.* p. 84.

attingunt. *Remiges* fuscae, marginibus flavo-virentibus. *Remex* 4ta longissima. *Alae* subtus fusco-faliginosae. *Cauda* cuneata. *Rectrices* (4 extimae quae tantum in specimine nostro aderant, reliquis scelopeto evulsis) fuscae, tertia parte ad apicem nigrae, marginibus extimis flavo-virentibus, 6ta extima utrimque macula ante apicem obliqua alba, 5-3 margine interiore ante apicem macula rotundata alba.

“ *Mensurae.*

“ Ab apice rostri ad extremum caudae	3 5/8 unc.
— — — ad unguem digiti medii ...	3 3/4 —
Alae expansae	9 —
Cauda	1 5/8 —
Pedes cum femoribus	2
Rostrum ad faucis angulum.....	1/2 —
— in fronte.....	3/16 —”

It seems to me difficult to understand how it is Gray was not able to recognise in so exact a portrait the bird J. Macgillivray had brought back from Nu Island and which he had himself described under the name of *Acanthiza flavolateralis**, a common bird in every part of New Caledonia, known in our days under the same specific name but classed in the genus *Pseudogerygone*. It is indeed sufficient to have a specimen in one's hand to see that Forster's description fits in every particular, size, colour, anatomical characters, so far as they can be observed. In the absence of any representative of the species, the same result is also obtained from a comparison of the texts, particularly if we go back for *Pseudogerygone flavolateralis*, not to Gray's original description of it, but to the more complete description of Sharpe, drawn up from the type-specimen preserved in the British Museum. I have already given Forster's description of his *Turdus minutus* from Botany Island; to make a comparison easier, I am now giving that of the type of *Acanthiza flavolateralis*, borrowed respectively from Gray and Sharpe.

* G. R. Gray, Proc. Zool. Soc. London, 1859, p. 161, no. 9.

“ *Acanthiza flavolateralis*.

“ Head and upper part of neck cinereous; back olivaceous; quills blackish-fuscons, margined with olive; throat, breast, middle of the abdomen, and a line from nostril to above the eye cinereous white; sides of abdomen bright yellow; tail fuscons, lateral feathers black, marked near the tip of each with white; bill and feet black. Length 3'' 8''' , wings 2'' 1''' .” (G. R. Gray, *Proc. Zool. Soc. London*, 1859, p. 161, no. 9.)

“ *Pseudogerygone flavilateralis*.

“ *Adult* (type of species). General colour above olive, the head and neck ashy, extending on to the mantle; the rump a little more yellow than the back; wing-coverts olive, slightly shaded with ashy; greater series and primary-coverts dark brown, the former broadly, the latter narrowly edged with pale olive-yellow; quills dark brown, narrowly margined with olive-yellow; tail-feathers light brown, edged with olive, all but the centre feathers with a large white spot at the end of the inner web, increasing in extent towards the outermost, where it forms a subterminal bar across the feather; all the feathers with a broad subterminal shade of black; lores greyish white, forming also a narrow line above the eye; in front of the eye a dusky spot; round the eye a ring of greyish-white feathers; ear-coverts and sides of neck ashy brown like the head; checks and under surface of body ashy white, with a browner shade on the chest and sides of the breast, the under tail-coverts slightly tinged with yellow; sides of the body pale lemon-yellow; under wing-coverts and axillaries white, with a slight wash of pale yellow; quills brown below, margined with white along the inner web. Total length 3·6 inches, culmen 0·4, wing 2, tail 1·6, tarsus 0·7.” (R. B. Sharpe, *Cat. Birds Brit. Mus.* iv. 1879, p. 222.)

There is, in my opinion, absolutely no room left for a doubt, and, if the authors who later on have studied the ornithological fauna of New Caledonia have never thought

of the comparison I have just made clear, it is apparently that, placing their entire confidence in Gray's works, they have, in the present case, blindly copied them, without going back to the sources.

I must add that it is the same *P. flavolateralis* which is mentioned as *Muscylva* (?) by Jouan in his Catalogue of New Caledonian Birds*.

No alteration fortunately has to be made in the nomenclature now in use. The name proposed by Forster belongs only to the bird found in New Zealand, of which we have first spoken; it gives way, besides, before *Parus macrocephalus* Gmelin, which has a considerable priority. On the other hand, in Gray's work, *flavolateralis*, which is previous to *forsteri*, must be preferred; *forsteri* could just be used as a subspecific designation in case a special form should be found in the locality where Cook's Expedition noticed the bird.

In conclusion, without going any further than the publication of the British Museum Catalogue, vol. iv., the synonymy of *Pseudogerygone flavolateralis flavolateralis* † must be established as follows:—

Turdus minutus J. R. Forster, Deser. Anim. 1844, p. 84
(*tantum*) (*Insula Botany*).

Acanthiza flavolateralis G. R. Gray, Proc. Zool. Soc.
London, 1859, p. 161 (*Island of Nu*).

Petroica ? G. R. Gray, Proc. Zool. Soc. London,
1859, p. 161.

Petroica forsteri G. R. Gray, Cat. Birds Trop. Isl. Pacific
Oc. 1859, p. 15.

Acanthiza flavolateralis G. R. Gray, Cat. Birds Trop. Isl.
Pacific Oc. 1859, p. 15.

Petroica ? J. Verreaux & O. Des Murs, Rev. et Mag.
Zool. (2) xii. 1860, p. 391.

* H. Jouan, Mém. Soc. Imp. Sc. Nat. Cherbourg, ix. 1863, p. 219,
no. 18.

† A Lifu form has been distinguished by F. Sarasin under the name
of *P. flavilateralis lifuensis* (Vög. Neu-Caled. und Loyalty-Ins. p. 21,
1913).

- Acanthiza flavo-lateralis* J. Verreaux & O. Des Murs,
Rev. et Mag. Zool. (2) xii. 1860, p. 391.
- Acanthiza flavolateralis* J. Verreaux & O. Des Murs,
Rev. et Mag. Zool. (2) xii. 1860, p. 435.
- Acanthiza flavo-lateralis* J. Verreaux & O. Des Murs,
Rev. et Mag. Zool. (2) xiv. 1862, p. 132.
- Muscylva*? H. Jouan, Mém. Soc. Imp. Sc. Nat.
Cherbourg, ix. 1863, p. 219, no. 18.
- Acanthiza flavolateralis* G. R. Gray, Hand-list Birds, i.
1869, p. 219.
- Petroica fosteri* (sic) G. R. Gray, Hand-list Birds, i.
1869, p. 228.
- Petroica* sp.? E. Marie, Actes Soc. Linn. Bordeaux, xxvii.
1870, p. 327.
- Acanthiza flavo-lateralis* E. Marie, Actes Soc. Linn. Bor-
deaux, xxvii. 1870, p. 327.
- Acanthiza flavilateralis* C. G. Giebel, Thes. Ornith. i.
1872, p. 258.
- Acanthiza flavolateralis* A. Boucard, Cat. Av. 1874,
p. 153.
- Petroica fosteri* (sic) A. Boucard, Cat. Av. 1874, p. 178.
- Gerygone flavolateralis* E. L. & E. L. C. Layard, Ibis, (4)
i. 1877, p. 357.
- Petroica* sp.? E. Marie, Ibis, (4) i. 1877, p. 362.
- Acanthiza flavolateralis* E. Marie, Ibis, (4) i. 1877,
p. 362.
- Petroica* sp.? E. L. & E. L. C. Layard, Ibis, (4) ii. 1878,
p. 254.
- Gerygone flavolateralis* E. L. & E. L. C. Layard, Ibis, (4)
ii. 1878, p. 254.
- Gerygone flavolateralis* H. B. Tristram, Ibis, (4) iii. 1879,
p. 182.
- Pseudogerygone flavilateralis* R. B. Sharpe, Notes Mus.
Leyden, i. 1879, p. 30.
- Petræca forsteri* R. B. Sharpe, Cat. Birds Brit. Mus. iv.
1879, p. 176.
- Pseudogerygone flavilateralis* R. B. Sharpe, Cat. Birds Brit.
Mus. iv. 1879, p. 222.